

Scheduling life around business



By Judy Lawrence

A new groomer on my staff was recently going through the turmoil of trying to schedule a week-long vacation to Disneyworld. For the past year, her children have been begging her to go see Mickey and Minnie. After several weeks of deliberation and shifting thirteen client appointments to an already overwhelmed colleague, she impulsively decided to make her way to Florida.

Unfortunately for those of us who have either worked on commission or owned a business in the grooming industry, our personal lives have taken a backseat over the past several years. The glass half-full camp would suggest our industry is experiencing an increase in grooming sales with fewer "slow" periods. Meanwhile the glass half-empty camp would describe the purchasing patterns of our customers to be seasonally and emotionally driven, creating an uncomfortable level of unpredictability. Not to be indecisive, but I tend to be a "glass is at half capacity" kind of gal, and truthfully, both camps are correct.

Our industry has witnessed tremendous growth over the past 10 years with sales in 2004 closing in on \$2.3 billion. Ninety-two percent of dog owners groom their pets and the majority of these owners have their dogs professional groomed at least once a year (1.8). In a recent national survey, 79% of dog owners had hired a professional groomer in the past 12 months. Additionally, we know there is a seasonal nature to our business with higher frequency of grooms during the warmer months of the year when dogs are more active and dirty. Of course these months coincide with summer break for our children.

To add more complexity to our personal lives, most

of our appointments occur on weekends. Obviously all of this has increasingly placed a strain on the time we are spending with family and friends.

We need a plan to take back our lives and our schedules. But how do we make time without hurting business? Here are some suggestions I've found to be helpful in my own business practices:

Plan time off at least three months in advance and notify your biggest clients.

It sounds like common sense, but some of us (me included) get so caught up in our daily schedules we forget to organize time off until the last minute. Don't be like those clients who call Saturday morning expecting an appointment that day. Dedicate at least one week every six months to time away from the salon and let all of your standing appointments know well in advance.

Coordinate appointments with grooming colleagues.

Whether you work with a staff of groomers or thrive on your own, you should know people in the business who can pitch in with last minute appointments. Call your colleagues several weeks in advance and ask them to substitute in your absence. They will call on you to do the same in the future, I promise.

Stock products and distribute samples that will lengthen time between grooms.

Initially you may think this would cut into your profits by reducing the number of grooming visits, however, my experience is completely the opposite. First, your clients will appreciate the quality of products you stock and reward your honesty with loyalty. Second, knowing what products your clients use to groom at home will help you predict a range of time for when their next appointment is due. Distribute sample sizes if you need to generate interest, but get to know your client's habits and patterns.

Balancing our complicated business schedules and personal lives is never an easy task. My groomer learned a tough lesson when she returned from her Florida vacation to find ten of the thirteen clients she stranded had decided to keep their business with the colleague who covered the appointments in her absence. She's already promised herself to be more proactive and organized the next time around.

Remember, our grooming schedules are one of the few things we can control is this booming industry. We must make time for family and friends as well as our clients. Both are important for being successful in business and in life. 🐾

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